

Mental Health Awareness

What is Depression?

When you have depression, it **interferes with daily life** and **causes pain for both you and those who care about you.**

Depression is a common but serious illness.



Signs & Symptoms

Depression is defined by at least **five** of the following occurring simultaneously for at least **two weeks** in adults:

- Depressed mood during most of the day, particularly morning
- Fatigue, loss of energy
- Feelings worthlessness or guilty
- Impaired concentration, indecisiveness
- Insomnia, hypersomnia (excessive sleeping)
- Markedly diminished interest or pleasure in almost all activities almost everyday
- Recurring thoughts of death or suicide
- Restlessness
- Significant weight loss or gain

Causes of Depression

Research indicates that depressive illnesses are disorders of the brain.

There is often a **combination** of the causes of depression:

Abuse. Past physical, sexual, or emotional.

Medications. Ex. Some drugs for high blood pressure (beta-blockers or reserpine).

Conflict. Personal conflicts or disputes with family members or friends.

Death or loss. Sadness or grief from a death can increase the risk of depression.

Genetics. Family history of depression may increase risk.

Major events. Includes good events (new job, graduating, getting married) or moving, losing a job, divorce, and retirement.

Serious illnesses. Depression may coexist with a major illness or a reaction to the illness.

Substance abuse. Nearly 30% people with substance abuse problems also have major or clinical depression.

Risk Factors

Depression typically begins in the **late 20s** but can happen at any age. The following factors appear to increase the risk of developing or triggering depression:

- Biological relatives with depression
- Female
- Traumatic experiences as a child
- Family history of alcoholism
- Family members who have committed suicide
- Experiencing stressful life events (ex. death of loved one)
- Few friends or personal relationships



- Recently haven given birth
- Depressed mood as a child
- Serious illness
- Low self-esteem, overly dependent, self-critical, pessimistic
- Busing alcohol, nicotine or illicit drugs
- Being poor
- Taking certain high blood pressure medications or sleeping pills

Prevention of Depression

Depression is **highly treatable** through good health habits. However, some forms may not be preventable since it is triggered by a chemical malfunctioning in the brain.



Get in the habit!

- ✓ Proper diet, exercise
- ✓ Taking time out for fun and relaxation
- ✓ Not overworking
- ✓ Saving time to do things you enjoy

How Can I Help?

...if it is a loved one who is depressed?

- Make an appointment or go with him/her if they already have one.
- Offer emotional support, understanding, and encouragement.
- Listen carefully.
- Never dismiss feelings, but point out realities and offer hope.
- Never ignore comments about suicide, and report them to his/her therapist or doctor.
- Invite them on walks, outings, and other activities. Keep trying if they decline, but don't push them too much too soon.
- Remind them that with time and treatment, the depression will lift.

...if it is myself who is depressed?

- Do not wait too long to get evaluated or treated. Research indicates that the longer one waits, the greater the impairment can be down the road.
- Be active and exercise. Do an activity you once enjoyed.
- Set realistic goals for yourself.
- Break up large tasks into small ones, set some realistic priorities.
- Spend time with other people and confide in a trusted friend or relative.
- Expect your mood to improve gradually, not immediately. Often, sleep and appetite will begin to improve before your depressed mood lifts.
- Postpone important decisions (marriage, divorce, changing jobs) until you feel better. Discuss decisions with others.